

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND TWENTY-EIGHTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 17 June 1999, at 10.15 a.m.

President:

Mr. Mohamed-Salah Dembri

(Algeria)

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): I declare open the 828th plenary session of the Conference on Disarmament.

I should first like to extend a warm welcome on behalf of all of us to Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs. We are honoured by his presence here today as we prepare to close the second phase of our annual session and apply ourselves to the task of establishing our programme of work.

As you know, the representative of Egypt, Ambassador Mounir Zahran, is about to leave Geneva. Ambassador Zahran is the doyen of the Conference on Disarmament, having come to Geneva and taken up his duties in August 1991. Not long afterwards - in 1992 - our Conference appointed him to the office of Special Coordinator with responsibility for seeking a consensus on an organizational framework for agenda item 8, "Comprehensive programme of disarmament". At the beginning of our 1993 session, he chaired the Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency in Armaments and from August to December of the same year he served as President of the Conference. In 1996 he was appointed Chairman of Working Group 2 - Legal and Institutional Issues - of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban. In 1997, Ambassador Zahran served as Special Coordinator dealing with the improved and effective functioning of the Conference. His performance in all of these varied and exacting offices was outstanding and our Conference is indebted to him for his service. We are all familiar with the effectiveness, clarity of vision and commitment he displayed in defence of his country's positions and of those of the Group of 21 in this forum. We need no reminding of Ambassador Zahran's commitment to the resolution of weighty and sensitive issues which he addressed with his customary good humour. I should like, on behalf of the Conference on Disarmament and on my own behalf, to wish Ambassador Zahran and his family every happiness. I shall now give him the floor, following which I shall give the floor to the representatives of France and Ukraine.

Mr. ZAHRAN (Egypt) (translated from Arabic): Mr. President, I wish to congratulate you warmly on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference. I am confident that your recognized ability and experience will assist the Conference in embarking on its substantive work after a long wait. I should also like to thank the others who have served as President of the Conference during this session: Ambassador Robert Grey of the United States, Ambassador Cedeño of Venezuela and Ambassador Nguyen Quy Binh of Viet Nam.

As I address the Conference today, my eight-year term as Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva is drawing to a close. I can admit today that the assignment has not been an easy one. Indeed, I could probably say without exaggeration that my work in Geneva has occupied most of my time and thoughts, permeating my whole existence and becoming the miniature cosmos in which I have been living for the past eight years. If I were to consider the sum total of my assignments in Geneva as the solar system, the Conference on Disarmament would represent for me the planet Earth, the world we love, which, from our vantage point, occupies a unique and prominent position, with vibrant life on its surface, hopes hovering in the air and disappointments clouding its skies and horizons from time to time.

(Mr. Zahran, Egypt)

I vividly recall having viewed the conference room from every angle, with its former seating arrangement and with the present horseshoe arrangement after the addition of seats in the middle of the room to accommodate the expanded membership of the Conference. Thanks to the rule of alphabetical rotation, I have moved around the entire room during the past eight years. I have occupied all the seats reserved for heads of delegations and for the President of the Conference. I have become acquainted with the characters depicted by the artist José María Sert who keep watch over the room and I have viewed them from every angle, in various settings of light and shade, and under the influence of the changes of mood and morale that the Conference has experienced over the past eight years. The paintings have come to represent an integral part of the work of the Conference, echoing its deliberations, blending into its technical work and rounding it out. I have often wondered about the message that is being conveyed to us by those hundreds of figures frozen in a posture of eternal suffering. I have repeatedly asked myself a question that continues to occupy my mind as I leave the Conference today: Is the Conference on Disarmament really doing everything in its power to save the peoples of the world from the scourge of war, as stated in the preamble to the Charter of the United Nations?

At times, I reassured myself that the Conference was indeed fulfilling the role entrusted to it, within the limits imposed by the realities of international relations. It seemed as though the people looking down on us from the walls and ceilings of this room were casting a blessing on our work and sympathizing with our efforts. But I cannot conceal the fact that my answer to the question was usually accompanied by mixed feelings, a sense that the figures were ignoring our statements, dismissing them as a waste of time. It was as though we were crying in the wilderness - an image inspired by Abraham's journey. Indeed, their mocking looks sometimes turned into reproachful stares. But on other occasions they seemed to radiate optimism, for example when some advance - however marginal - was achieved, offering a glimmer of hope that better things were on their way, particularly in negotiations about our top priority - nuclear disarmament. But even as I leave Geneva, it is still a dream that has failed to come true.

I shall most certainly miss this room with its unique Spanish art and its somewhat sombre decor, bereft of cheery colours and bright lights. But above all I shall miss the colleagues with whom I have worked with such deep commitment over a long period of time. Some of them are still here; others have left before me. Many have made their mark on this forum and helped in one way or another to form its collective spirit. Part of this spirit remains with each one of us wherever we go. For the Conference on Disarmament, the sole multilateral negotiating forum for disarmament, extends far beyond the confines of this room. It is a product of the hopes of mankind, a torch received from our predecessors, faithfully and proudly carried forward and passed on to our successors.

My thoughts turn at this point to a number of individuals who had a far-reaching influence on the spirit of the proceedings and on myself. I cannot possibly name them all, but let me mention at least Ambassador Antonio de Icaza of Mexico, with his distinctive voice and irresistible logic, and Ambassador Munir Akram of Pakistan, with his

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well-ordered arguments and a name that has linked us in many people's minds, leading to instances of mistaken identity; Ambassador Mark Moher of Canada, whom I mention as evidence of the lack of bias among us towards the countries of the South and as a living refutation of the argument that diplomats are incapable of combining pragmatic and principled approaches; Ambassador Robert Grey, whose direct approach leaves no room for misunderstanding of his positions; Ambassador Joëlle Bourgois, defender of the musical French language and Cartesian logic; her successor Ambassador de La Fortelle, Ambassador Arundhati Ghose and Ambassador Savitri Kunadi of India and many others who left an indelible mark on the proceedings of the Conference on Disarmament.

It is an undeniable fact that the Conference on Disarmament has over the years developed its own distinctive characteristics and traditions. But it also faithfully mirrors the state of international relations in general, although its geographical groups do not reflect the post-cold-war situation in which the positions of the Eastern and Western groups are virtually identical. There now seem to be basically two groups: North and South.

After spending eight years in this conference room and its corridors, it is time to pause for a moment to assess the wide-ranging experience I have accumulated from day to day. I feel it is an assessment that ought to be shared with this distinguished assembly.

First, the achievements - and there certainly have been achievements in recent years which should not be underestimated, despite the reservations we expressed at the time. I shall mention a few of them, starting with the prohibition of chemical weapons. The Chemical Weapons Convention is one more step towards ridding the world of all weapons of mass destruction. The verification mechanisms for the Convention set an important precedent in terms of mechanisms for the other treaties dealing with weapons of mass destruction, particularly the verification protocol for the Biological Weapons Convention.

Secondly, the comprehensive test ban: the title Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) was actually a misnomer. I have repeatedly pointed out that it is merely a second partial test-ban treaty, since it does not cover all nuclear tests. Nevertheless, the treaty has established a legal framework for the resolve of the international community to halt all explosive nuclear testing and an appropriate basis for its appeal to all countries to commit themselves not just to a narrow literal interpretation of the provisions of the Treaty but to its substance and spirit.

Thirdly, the Conference has succeeded in establishing a negotiating mandate - the foundation stone for a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear explosions - by taking the important step at its 1998 session of establishing an Ad Hoc Committee under agenda item 1 to negotiate such a treaty. A point to be stressed is that the establishment of the Committee under agenda item 1, "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament", confirms that the aims of the desired treaty are not limited to non-proliferation but cover nuclear disarmament too. I shall not go into the details of my Government's position in this regard, which has repeatedly been reflected in the Conference records, but shall simply make

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two personal remarks. First, it is important to ensure that the scope of the treaty is as wide as possible and that an effective verification mechanism is established as the backbone of the treaty, which would otherwise be of no practical importance. Secondly, if we are determined to produce a treaty banning fissile material, we must set our minds to the task as soon as possible, clearing away all the procedural obstacles, since the value of the treaty will depend on its early entry into force.

While the achievements of the Conference are undeniable, I would be lacking in the frankness that this occasion demands if I failed to mention the many areas in which no progress whatsoever has been made. This failure is compounded by the fact that the areas concerned represent key demands of almost all the peoples of the world.

The first area is that of nuclear disarmament. The Conference will remain totally incapable of taking any effective negotiating steps so long as it fails to achieve the aim of nuclear disarmament set forth in article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, ratified 30 years ago, despite the decision on "Principles and objectives" adopted by the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference. Some people are talking about the need to adopt a practical and pragmatic approach, which means deciding at the outset that it is impossible for the Conference to make any headway in this regard. They view our talk about nuclear disarmament being a vital prerequisite for the survival of the human race as a mere flight of fancy. I can find no better response than to cite one of the foremost scientists in human history, Albert Einstein, who asked "If not now, when? If not us, who?"

We are not opposed to any unilateral or bilateral measures by the nuclear-weapon States aimed at reducing their nuclear arsenals, but we continue to stress the need for the Conference on Disarmament to conduct negotiations on nuclear disarmament as the only multilateral forum possessing the authority to do so.

The positions adopted on the subject by other important international forums should be called to mind at this point. First, the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of July 1996. Secondly, the programme of work on nuclear disarmament that I submitted to the Conference on behalf of 28 member countries of the Group of 21 on 8 August 1996, providing for the eradication of nuclear weapons in three stages culminating in the year 2020. Then there was the 1996 decision of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities urging the Conference on Disarmament to negotiate a treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons and stating that there was no place for nuclear weapons in international relations. The report of the Canberra Commission was also issued in 1996. Lastly, there were the initiative sponsored by Egypt and the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1974 to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East and President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak's important initiative in 1991 to rid the Middle East of all weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems. This was reflected in numerous resolutions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and many other international and regional forums, including the summit of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries in Durban in 1998.

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I wish to take this opportunity to repeat what I said in May this year at the third session of the Preparatory Committee for the NPT Review Conference to be held in the year 2000 by calling on all countries in the Middle East that have not already done so to accede to or to ratify the BWC, CWC and NPT simultaneously so that the zone can be established as soon as possible, guaranteeing security and stability for all the peoples of the region. I should also like to mention President Mubarak's 1998 initiative aimed at ridding the whole world of all weapons of mass destruction and his call for an international conference to achieve that goal.

Another significant development has been the emergence as an effective international movement of the group that issued the declaration entitled "Towards a nuclear-weapon-free world: the need for a new agenda". Its membership has been growing day by day and civil society has begun to identify with it as a solid basis for the hope that nuclear disarmament efforts may prove successful in the future if they take the form of firm, practical and effective steps, as reflected in General Assembly resolution 53/77 Y.

With regard to the prevention of an arms race in outer space, I cannot find any justification for the failure of the Conference to address the issue. The aim is to halt an arms race that is both destructive and a waste of human resources before it takes off. If we cannot even manage to negotiate seriously about the issue now, does it mean that we intend to stand idly by as this dangerous technology, controlled by a mere handful of States, is developed, knowing that its historical implications for the human race could be increased suffering and a growing threat to the security and stability of peoples? It is argued in some quarters that outer space is not currently used for the deployment or stockpiling of weapons, but does that mean we should wait until it happens? Surely prevention is better than cure. Are we to wait until a disaster occurs before facing up to its consequences? I well remember the deliberations at the first special session of the General Assembly on disarmament in 1978, when the delegation of the Soviet Union, noting that outer space was not yet being used for military operations, demanded that such operations should be prohibited in the future. I therefore sincerely urge the Conference to start negotiations as speedily as possible on a treaty to prohibit the use of outer space for military purposes of any kind, so that humankind is spared the dangers of this gap in the legislation governing international relations and so that outer space is used solely for peaceful purposes.

At this point, I should like to reiterate the proposal I have made repeatedly on behalf of the Egyptian delegation that the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) should carry out a study of new categories of weapons of mass destruction that may be developed in the near future. The purpose of the proposal was to check these undesirable developments by negotiating a ban on the production of such weapons before they even start to be produced. I wish to add that the proposal is not intended to serve narrow Egyptian interests but is based on a general humanitarian approach designed to benefit the whole human race. I hope that such studies are undertaken before the international community is presented with a fait accompli that is difficult to address or change.

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If I wished to say what conclusion I have reached after this prolonged experience, I could summarize it in one sentence: the Conference must keep abreast of the significant developments that are constantly occurring in the world today and cast off the image of an antiquated club in which the air is stale and the ideas time-worn.

The first and most important characteristic of the present era is democracy, which is basically at odds with the practices of this Conference, since a small group of States - or even a single State - can prevent the Conference from addressing issues that are of vital importance to the overwhelming majority of its members on the pretext of consensus, which is interpreted by some as allowing any member who so wishes to exercise a veto over both substantive and procedural issues such as the establishment of committees and the appointment of coordinators, thereby perverting the proceedings of the Conference.

The second characteristic of the era is transparency, which implies that the real positions of States should be presented openly and clearly to the entire international community and that delegations should not conceal their true positions behind outmoded mechanisms and traditions. I therefore see the need to open up the Conference to more substantive discussions, which should be held at plenary or informal open-ended meetings instead of behind closed doors or in the form of restricted informal consultations. Transparency is an effective confidence-building measure that can promote understanding and break the deadlock that is becoming a chronic feature of the Conference.

Transparency in the area of disarmament applies to all categories of weapons and military technology, including weapons of mass destruction, and not just to conventional weapons. Only then can transparency provide a clear overview of the unwarranted accumulation of every kind of weapons in all States, posing a threat to international peace and security, and serve as an early warning system.

The third characteristic - and perhaps one of the key principles of modern civilization - is equality and non-discrimination. By equality we mean equality in rights and duties. If we agree to condemn the use of weapons of mass destruction, we should also condemn their possession, prohibit their production and destroy all stockpiles because the continued possession of any such weapon implies that it can still be used. Moreover, its use or the threat of its use is equivalent to the crime of genocide, which was one of the subjects discussed in connection with the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court that the international community agreed to establish in 1998. It follows that when we call for the eradication of weapons of mass destruction, our appeal should be addressed to everybody, and when we agree to ban nuclear tests, we should reject all nuclear tests without exception, whether conducted by means of explosions or by other technological means. And when we talk about security and stability, we mean security for all without discrimination and without exception. Selectivity and double standards are among the most serious challenges facing the international community today, and the Conference on Disarmament must shun them.

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The fourth characteristic is, as we all know and have repeated in other forums, the participation of civil society. Here again we find that the Conference on Disarmament is one of the last remaining bastions in which a large number of developed countries are still stubbornly opposed to any role for civil society. The fact is that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are repositories of creative ideas and possess abundant resources that would certainly help to revitalize the work of the Conference and rescue it from the state of hibernation into which it has lapsed. For example, the Conference has no Internet site in which it could regularly publish delegations' statements and the Conference records. That would be a simple step but an effective way of disseminating information and involving civil society, including relevant NGOs that cannot afford a permanent presence in Geneva. I therefore repeat what I have proposed on many occasions: that NGOs should be given a voice in the plenary meetings. It is a step that I imagine is inevitable in the near future.

In taking up these points, I have sought to highlight a number of principles which I view as major human achievements that deserve to be promoted in all forums.

I take leave of this Conference as we approach the threshold of a new millennium that I hope will usher in favourable developments in international relations in general and an end to the chronic inertia of the Conference on Disarmament in particular. To that end, I have tried to offer some comments that may help my friends and colleagues in the Conference to fulfil their collective aspiration to see the Conference discharging its mandate to the full, as the sole international negotiating forum on disarmament issues.

I welcome the return to Geneva of Ambassador Celso Amorim, the Permanent Representative of Brazil, who is to occupy his country's seat after a six-year absence during which he served as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Permanent Representative of Brazil in New York. I also welcome Ambassador Pius Ayewoh of Nigeria and extend warm thanks and appreciation to Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, Secretary-General of the Conference and Personal Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General, and to his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, and the members of the Conference secretariat for all the support they have given me and the Egyptian delegation when I was President of the Conference on Disarmament in 1994, when I was appointed Special Coordinator for transparency in armaments and the comprehensive programme of disarmament in 1992 and for the improved and effective functioning of the Conference in 1997, when I chaired the Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency in Armaments in 1993 and when I chaired the Working Group on Legal and Institutional Matters during the negotiations on the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty in 1997.

I wish to say to all my friends that although I am leaving you, our friendship will continue and I look forward to meeting you and welcoming you all to Cairo whenever you visit the city. So I will not say farewell but au revoir.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): It is always a very moving time for us when a colleague leaves us, and particularly when that colleague has occupied a major place within this think-tank on issues which affect the

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future of all mankind, its harmonious future, and I consider above all as a good omen the fact that on the serious issues of disarmament our colleague Mounir Zahran should have drawn above all on universal popular wisdom by peppering his statement with quotations which all testify to his militant spirit in favour of the harmonious and salutary convergence of cultures and civilizations. We thank him for that, and I thank him personally for the friendly words he addressed to me, and on behalf of you all, for all those who were also mentioned in his statement.

I now give the floor to the representative of France, Ambassador de La Portelle.

Mr. de La PORTELLE (France) (translated from French): Mr. President, speaking for the first time in this second part of the 1999 session of the Conference on Disarmament, I would like to convey my sincere congratulations to you and assure you of the full support of my delegation in the delicate mission entrusted to you. I am sure that your distinguished qualities, personal as well as professional, will enable you to do all that can be done to pull the Conference on Disarmament out of its present difficulties.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome our new colleagues who have just joined the Conference on Disarmament, the Ambassadors of Iraq, Slovakia and more recently Brazil and Nigeria. I am also very pleased to be delivering this statement before Mr. Dhanapala, the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, who has played and continues to play a distinguished role in matters of concern to us. Finally, as Ambassador Mounir Zahran has officially taken leave of us, I would like to say how sad I feel to witness the departure of a great diplomat, although and especially since the positions he upholds with great skill sometimes differ from ours. In my turn I extend to him every wish for happiness and success in the future.

The acknowledgement of stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament is doubly disturbing. First of all it is disturbing in the short term. It condemns the Conference on Disarmament to inaction, and does not enable it to meet the expectations of the international community. It also results in the "cut-off" being held hostage despite a resolution adopted by consensus at the last General Assembly of the United Nations. It is also disturbing in the medium and long term. Were this situation to be further prolonged, it would be bound to have a lasting effect on the image of the Conference on Disarmament, whose inability to pursue its mission would lead to a loss of credibility. It would also help to throw doubt on the value of the multilateral approach to disarmament and enhance the risk of a relapse into unilateralism.

A salutary jolt is needed. What should we avoid? We need to avoid making facile propaganda ploys and deploring failure as inevitable. What can we do? We need to seek ways and means of making realistic and balanced progress. This was what prompted the proposal by the United States, the United Kingdom and France which was presented on 20 May 1999 (CD/1586).

This leads me quite naturally to recapitulate the fundamental ideas which underpin our approach to disarmament and are translated into action in

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the Conference on Disarmament. This approach to disarmament is based on four fundamental ideas. The first idea, from which all the rest flows, is the legitimate right to security for all States. This is enshrined in the United Nations Charter, which recognizes the legitimate right of each State, large or small, to security, a universal right equal for all. Its corollary is that each State should in a sovereign manner define its legitimate needs with respect to defence and security, within the framework of existing treaties. It follows from this that disarmament, in all its aspects, can in no circumstances be determined in an arbitrary fashion by others than the State concerned or be implemented to the detriment of the fundamental security interests of that State.

The second idea is that disarmament must be achieved with the participation by all. This idea is twofold. It means, on the one hand, that negotiations on disarmament agreements must be conducted within an appropriate multilateral framework. In addition, it implies that those agreements should be implemented in a universal fashion. Its corollary is the pursuit of universality, an essential safeguard for the effectiveness of existing agreements, whether we are talking about the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty or the conventions for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction such as the Convention prohibiting chemical weapons.

The third of these ideas is that disarmament must be subject to monitoring by all. There can be no real disarmament without the existence of effective machinery for verification applied under international control. Its corollary is that, for instance, a convention as important as that prohibiting biological weapons, signed in 1972, needs to be supplemented by adequate verification arrangements.

The fourth and last of these ideas is that disarmament needs to be viewed in all its dimensions. The principle was laid down in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, which spelled out the concept of general and complete disarmament. That quite obviously entails that disarmament cannot focus exclusively on one of its components to the detriment of all the others.

How are these fundamental ideas put into effect within the framework of the Conference on Disarmament? Today I will confine myself to the following two comments. The first comment concerns the agenda of the Conference. The Geneva forum will only fully discharge its principal negotiating task on the express condition that its members agree on a realistic and balanced agenda. Realistic, first of all, because it must constitute a point of equilibrium among the different concerns of the participants in the Conference. Balanced, also, because we hope that the agenda will vouchsafe appropriate treatment to conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction. Nothing would be more futile than to seek the means of disarmament on the basis of idle utopian dreams.

The second comment is concerned with nuclear disarmament. I will dwell somewhat longer on this owing to the sensitivity and topicality of the matter. If some here uphold the idea of a degree of constructive ambiguity in the

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field of nuclear disarmament, I am certainly going to disappoint them. This issue calls for the greatest possible clarity. I will avoid any form of bureaucratic jargon. Nothing could be more unworthy than to betray hopes by means of illusions.

So what can the Conference on Disarmament do in the field of nuclear disarmament? The reply is simple: negotiate the agreements which have been entrusted to it. It has done so in the past with the negotiations on the CTBT. It must do so in the future with the negotiations on the FMCT, the treaty to ban the production of fissile material. Everyone must agree that multilateral nuclear disarmament is a reality: the CTBT and the FMCT are the milestones on this path, the cornerstones. The former contributes to halting the qualitative development of nuclear weapons. The second will cap the quantitative development of fissile material used in nuclear weapons. The irreplaceable role of the Conference on Disarmament in negotiations on these two instruments has to be acknowledged.

But what is it that the CD is certainly not able to do in the field of nuclear disarmament? The reply is equally simple. Let us be clear: beyond this inventory of what is possible, we do not subscribe to the idea that the process of reducing nuclear arsenals would be more effectively advanced if negotiated in the Conference on Disarmament. Yet let us be honest enough to acknowledge the progress made in this field on the basis of bilateral and unilateral measures taken by the nuclear-weapon States. With respect to bilateral measures, the priority is to ratify Start II and begin negotiations on Start III as soon as possible. The contribution made by the Start process to reducing nuclear arsenals is well known. We must do nothing, in particular in the Conference on Disarmament, which might hinder or slow down this substantial progress. As for unilateral measures, the concept itself precludes their handling in a multilateral forum such as the Conference on Disarmament. I will conclude on this score by noting that, contrary to the argument which some seek to advance, the nuclear Powers are discharging their obligation under article VI of the NPT. Some countries might perhaps take an equal interest in reducing nuclear proliferation and the emergence of new nuclear capacities.

I will not recapitulate in detail the steps taken by my Government, the effects of which are spread out over several years. They were covered in a booklet widely distributed during the third Preparatory Committee for the NPT review conference last May, which is available to participants. I will confine myself to the most important features: a limited arsenal reduced to two components after the dismantling of the land-based nuclear component, a reduction in the nuclear military component of the defence budget, the dargeting of the nuclear elements of the French deterrent force, a final halt to nuclear testing and the closing down of the Pacific testing site, the dismantling of facilities for the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and assistance in the dismantling of Russian nuclear weapons.

Allow me to outline France's priorities both within the Conference on Disarmament and in the concentric circles which revolve around the Geneva nucleus. In the Conference on Disarmament, our priorities have not changed since the statement delivered by my predecessor on 26 February 1998. They are

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three in number. The first priority is to launch, as soon possible, the negotiations on the FMCT. The international community has turned to us in order that the Conference should begin negotiations on a treaty prohibiting the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. We must now address this matter resolutely. Let us, however, clearly delimit the task which is before us. Our common ambition is to be found in the very terms of the mandate proposed in 1995 by Ambassador Shannon: "The Conference directs the ad hoc committee to negotiate a non-discriminatory, multilaterally and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices". Non-discriminatory, since the purpose of the treaty is to extend to all States a legally binding undertaking to renounce the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. Multilateral, insofar as this treaty negotiated in the Conference on Disarmament is by its nature intended to be universal. To single out the five nuclear-weapon States to negotiate between themselves such an instrument would therefore be inappropriate. Internationally and effectively verifiable, that is to say constructing a credible verification mechanism, relevant in terms of the scope of the treaty and its universal character. I do not wish as of now to go into the details of the elements making up my delegation's position. We will return to this in the course of the debates organized within the future ad hoc committee itself.

Our second priority is the prevention of an arms race in space. My delegation remains attached to the idea that the Conference on Disarmament should address this question. It is particularly encouraged to pursue this approach by the findings of the report by our colleague Ambassador Palihakkara, the Special Coordinator in 1998, on the one hand, and on the other the results of the resolution adopted on this subject during the last General Assembly of the United Nations. Clearly, this is one of the major challenges to which the international community must rise on the threshold of the next century.

Several recent developments testify to the importance of preventing an arms race in space: the ballistic missile test carried out by the North Korean authorities last summer and the statements concerning possible developments regarding the 1972 ABM Treaty, which we know is the cornerstone of the strategic balance and the process of reducing nuclear arsenals by the United States and the Russian Federation. In this difficult context one avenue beckons to us. It has to do with the search for confidence-building measures to foster international provisions to enhance the security, transparency and predictability of space activities. In this respect my delegation tabled a proposal in 1993 concerning notification of the launching of space objects and ballistic missiles. Up to 1995 the work of the Ad Hoc Committee reflected growing acceptance of this concept.

Our third priority is designed to see the Conference on Disarmament finally making a contribution to the campaign against anti-personnel mines. The international community adopted an exemplary instrument in the form of the Ottawa Convention. Beyond the role we played in its drafting, France is wholeheartedly involved in its implementation. It will complete the destruction of its own stockpiles before the end of 1999. In addition, France

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jointly chairs the inter-sessional working group on technologies for mine action. The work begun in Ottawa is far from over, however, since universal acceptance of this norm is regrettably not yet in prospect. France, which is convinced that an additional stage is possible, seeks re-establishment of the post of special coordinator in the hope that he or she will rapidly be able to identify conditions for negotiating a ban on transfers.

Beyond these three priorities, other topics come to mind with a view to appropriate handling by the Conference. On the other aspects of nuclear disarmament, on the one hand, we have proposed together with the United States and the United Kingdom a formulation designed to address the interests of the States most closely concerned, which seemed to us capable of mustering the agreement of all. We have also shown ourselves willing to work on the basis of other proposals, such as that presented by Belgium on behalf of five countries. Furthermore, if that is the general desire, my delegation is prepared to accept the re-establishment of an ad hoc committee on negative security assurances. The fact that the Conference on Disarmament brings together States which are representative of the international community, particularly in those regions where the question of security assurances is most acute - I have in mind the Middle East and South Asia - means that it is the most appropriate forum to address this delicate subject if appropriate.

We would like to see the expansion of the Conference by a further five members. My delegation regrets that a consensus has so far failed to emerge on the package proposed by the Special Coordinator, Ambassador Hofer of Switzerland. We would also like to see further consideration of ways of improving the Conference's methods of work.

We should also concern ourselves with what is taking place in our Conference's broader sphere of influence. I have two issues in mind: biological weapons and small arms. First of all, we need to conclude the negotiations on a protocol for verification of the 1972 Convention on Biological Weapons as soon as possible. As you know, France has for many years deplored the lack of verification machinery in this Convention. However, much remains to be done if we are to attain this objective before the fifth review conference of States parties, in 2001 at the latest. France intends to meet this challenge with the other States participating in the work of the Ad Hoc Group. To be credible, this instrument should be based on a set of indispensable complementary measures, combining a system of visits with declarations and the possibility of conducting investigations. The year 1999 will be crucial. We hope that by the end of the year significant progress can be made to enable the protocol to be adopted by a special conference of the States parties in the year 2000.

Lastly, special attention should be paid to small arms and light weapons, whose excessive accumulation and illegal traffic are a threat to peace and security in many regions of the world. My country's approach focuses in particular on prevention and a regional approach which is more immediately promising in terms of concrete results. In a more general perspective, it considers that the conference which is to meet in Geneva in 2001 will offer an opportunity to make significant progress in the monitoring and control of legal and illegal flows of such weapons.

(Mr. de La Portelle, France)

There are better things to do than to repeat the errors of the past, which have demonstrated the inapplicability of approaches which were unrealistic and served as pretexts for inaction. Rather than the easy path of headline-grabbing, seductive, hasty and ultimately utopian disarmament, we have always preferred the more demanding path of serene, practical, well thought-out and for that very reason realistic disarmament; that path is the only guarantee of the security of each State, large or small, and for that very reason an assurance of greater security for all.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of France for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. I give the floor to the representative of Ukraine, Ambassador Maimeskul.

Mr. MAIMESKUL (Ukraine): Mr. President, let me first of all express my sincere congratulations to you on your assumption of the honourable as well as responsible duties of CD President. The new cycle of Presidential rotation began with the presidency of Algeria and you have already demonstrated in a very convincing manner that despite continuing suspense, our body could succeed in starting substantial work on its agenda items. We pledge our full support and cooperation in your efforts to achieve this goal.

Our appreciation goes also to your predecessors in the Presidential Chair: Ambassador Grey of the United States of America, Ambassador Cedeño of Venezuela and Ambassador Nguyen Quy Binh of Viet Nam. We feel obliged to reiterate words of gratitude and respect to the CD Secretary-General, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, and the CD secretariat. Let me also express warm words of farewell to Ambassador Zahran and convey to him and his family wishes for luck and every happiness. I would also like to thank Mr. Dhanapala, the Under-Secretary-General present here, for his continued attention to the work of this international body.

It has clearly been indicated in many statements delivered to the Conference on Disarmament during the second part of its annual session how sensitive and vulnerable the CD is to events which affect the international, regional and national security interests of its members.

One of these events has been the crisis in Kosovo. In their assessments of the situation in this region, so close to the Ukrainian border, the President of our State and its executive branch have been guided by the principles of impartiality and respect for the greatest of human rights - the right to live in peace and security, a rejection of violence and ethnic cleansing.

Based on this position, Ukraine was the first country to initiate, immediately after the start of military action in Yugoslavia, new attempts to find a diplomatic solution to the Kosovo crisis. The mediation initiative of the President of Ukraine, Mr. Leonid Kuchma, on the settlement of the Kosovo conflict was made public literally in its first hours, on 24 March. Two days later the delegation of Ukraine, including the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Defence, left for Belgrade to present in detail the Ukrainian initiative and propose its good offices in restoring peace in this region as a common value to all its inhabitants, irrespective of their ethnic

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origin. These our efforts were one of the contributions to the long diplomatic process which finally resulted in the Security Council resolution endorsing a peace plan for Kosovo. Ukraine, bearing additional economic hardships caused by the Yugoslavian crisis, wholeheartedly supports the peaceful settlement for Kosovo and notes with satisfaction that this result is due partly to Ukrainian efforts in that the United Nations Security Council resolution on Kosovo is also based on the relevant proposals of Ukraine.

We are aware that the comprehensive analysis of this conflict, its roots and its implications for the preservation of the international order based on the United Nations Charter, is still ahead. But I could not let pass in silence the fact that against the background of certain past and current developments, and in particular last year's nuclear explosions in South Asia, the continual six-year-long difficulties with the entry into force of START-2, the military means widely used to solve various regional conflicts, one could not but hear the concerns raised by the public and parliamentarians in various countries, including my own, that these events may only invigorate the visible trend to re-evaluate the validity of nuclear weapons and to attach greater importance to their possession. This trend obviously has a potential to increase the risk of further proliferation. Such a development is unacceptable to my country.

Much has already been said in this hall about the role played by Ukraine in achieving the goals of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. We are committed to continuing advancement in this direction and firmly advocate the principles of the NPT regime both in the international arena and inside our country. We also appeal to politicians, diplomats and journalists not to take the denuclearization of Ukraine for granted. This process was very complicated from both the legal and technical perspectives and required a lot of resources and international assistance, so for us it seems disgraceful and unjust that in the context of mentioning countries which have abandoned their military nuclear programmes or forsworn nuclear weapons the name of our country is sometimes not even found. With all due respect for other countries which opted for non-nuclear-weapon status, it should be admitted that the elimination of the third largest nuclear arsenal at that time, inherited from the former Soviet Union and recognized as the property of Ukraine, represents a major achievement of the existing nuclear non-proliferation regime as well as an important step in the nuclear arms reduction process.

Having adhered almost five years ago to the NPT, Ukraine participated for the first time in 1995 in the NPT Review and Extension Conference, which adopted among other documents the decision on principles and objectives in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. This decision, which is now frequently referred to as a "yardstick" for the implementation of the objectives in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, recognized that after the completion of the CTBT negotiations, the international community should pursue the early commencement and undelayed conclusion of the fissile material cut-off treaty. Needless to recall that the FMCT is a long-standing issue of the nuclear arms control agenda. Fifty years ago the ban on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons was supposed to be the real tool in preventing the nuclear arms race, which had been unleashed between the two antagonistic super-Powers. Since

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that time the international context has entirely changed. The "cold war", with its arms race, has ended, while large inventories of fissile material remain in stockpiles and in warheads dismantled in accordance with nuclear arms reduction treaties. This amount is so enormous that even the inexperienced observer might ask about the role to be played by the future FMCT in resolving the "existing stocks" issue. In recent publications, especially those of UNIDIR and the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) on the fissile material issue, the number of which has increased since the adoption of last year's 11 August decision to establish an ad hoc committee to negotiate a fissile material treaty, the issue of stocks, the scope of the future verification regime, etc. are being dealt with by renowned experts in the field. It seems that outside the CD several options for the FMT and its building blocks have already been identified and the task of diplomats is to find and follow, step by step, a track where the political objectives and expectations of their States will be adequately addressed. As the Conference has not resumed its negotiations on a fissile material production ban, one cannot prejudge the position of my delegation concerning each particular aspect of the future treaty.

At the same time, from our perspective, the future treaty should evolve from the following principles: the FMCT prohibits the production of highly enriched uranium and plutonium for nuclear warheads and other explosive devices; the FMCT includes an effective verification regime for compliance with the above-mentioned prohibition, its crucial elements being: submission of initial declarations about production facilities, regular inspections of declared sites, challenge inspections to reveal eventual prohibited activities in undeclared facilities; in the framework of the FMCT, all uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing facilities are subject to initial declarations, irrespective of their present status. All facilities which use or store fissile material produced after the FMCT's entry into force are also subject to declarations; and lastly, the future verification regime does not impose additional obligations on non-nuclear-weapon States which have full-scope safeguard agreements with IAEA.

In pursuing the goal of the FMCT, it is essential to secure its role as an instrument in both nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament. The Ukrainian delegation is very interested in finding an appropriate formula articulating these two intrinsically linked features of the future treaty.

While recognizing the FMT negotiations to be the major priority of CD work within item 1 of its agenda, we realize that other aspects of this item deserve our highest attention as well. "Attention" does not mean starting negotiations in the near future, all the more so as many have persuasively argued that except for the FMCT there is nothing ripe for negotiation at this stage. Having said this, I am nevertheless convinced that the CD has its undeniable role to play in promoting nuclear disarmament. The only question is how, keeping in mind that this role should be constructive and beneficial to all members of the international community. In this connection, I appreciate working document CD/1574, presented by Canada, which includes concrete topics deserving focused discussions in the CD, as well as concise and exhaustive arguments in favour of such discussions. To conduct deliberations on different aspects of nuclear disarmament, the CD needs to

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establish a subsidiary mechanism even if its mandate is a limited, exploratory one. In the current international context, the most suitable mechanism would be an ad hoc working group headed by one chairman, in course of at least one CD session. From my perspective as a former President of the CD, I am inclined more and more to consider the "Presidential troika" mechanism as a tool in resolving complicated procedural issues, such as the establishment of a subsidiary body, as exemplified by its activities last year, and not as suitable for the conduct of regular discussions on one concrete issue and its set of closely related aspects.

The issue of negative security assurances was intensively discussed last year within the framework of the relevant Ad Hoc Committee. The exchange of views between delegations revealed and articulated the organic relationship between the provisions enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the assurances against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States. From Ukraine's point of view, the lack of an international multilateral legally binding agreement on NSA continues to be one of the serious drawbacks of the existing nuclear non-proliferation regime. Against the background of the devastating effects due to the use of conventional weapons, demonstrated to the whole world in recent years, it seems inconceivable that circumstances might push a nuclear-weapon State to use or even to threaten to use these weapons against NNWS. It also seems unlikely that nuclear deterrence could play a role in preventing the NNWS from possibly attacking or threatening NWS with chemical or biological weapons. These are only some of the focal points which could be extensively explored, if the Ad Hoc Committee on NSA is re-established during this annual session, a step we would certainly support.

Agenda item 3, "Prevention of the arms race in outer space", has acquired a new significance among CD member States in the light of certain events which occurred last year and plans to avoid the threat they may constitute. Moreover, the number of States with a capacity to launch missiles and place objects into space orbit is continually growing. Thus, preventive measures should be taken to assure that no weapons are placed in outer space. Achievement of this goal will not be easy, as not only weaponization, but also the militarization of outer space is perceived by many States as a threat to their security. Taking into account that no country voted against United Nations General Assembly resolution 53/76, which stated in particular that no country in the CD last year objected in principle to the re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on PAROS, it was reasonable to expect that the Conference would move forward in that direction. Therefore, our delegation is ready to support any proposal concerning the establishment of a subsidiary body or mechanism to deal with PAROS which could command CD consensus.

The host of problems created by the dissemination and indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines continues to draw the attention of politicians, diplomats, humanitarian aid and health-care workers and NGOs. At the end of last year, amended Protocol II to the Inhumane Weapons Convention of 1980 entered into force and on 1 March this year, the Ottawa Convention became a part of the international law. Ukraine is actively involved in international endeavours aimed at eradicating this dangerous type of conventional weapon.

(Mr. Maimeskul, Ukraine)

Amended Protocol II, the so-called partial ban, has been submitted to the Verkhovna Rada (Diet) of Ukraine for its consideration and is expected to be ratified soon. Our country also signed on 24 February of this year the Ottawa Convention, thereby committing itself to the goal of the complete elimination of all existing APLs, stocked and in minefields, as well as never proceeding to their manufacture and transfer. In parallel, the Government of Ukraine has extended for a further four years the moratorium on the export of all types of anti-personnel landmines which was initially adopted in 1995. With this positive and promising record in efforts to achieve a ban on APLs, the Ukrainian delegation welcomes the fact that Geneva has been chosen as the venue for the inter-sessional work and annual meetings in the framework of the Ottawa Convention and for the annual conferences stipulated in amended Protocol II. These future activities are certainly a form of response to the mute appeal coming from the giant chair with one crippled leg erected on the Place des Nations to commemorate those killed, maimed or wounded by APLs. It is regrettable that despite the efforts of a large group of delegations and consultations by the Special Coordinator on APLs, the Conference as a whole does not show a willingness to elaborate at least intermediate steps to achieve a universal ban on APLs. Our delegation would be ready to support the reappointment of the Special Coordinator on APLs as well as of a Special Coordinator on transparency in armaments, to ensure a balance within the CD on nuclear and conventional arms control.

My survey of the tasks laid before the CD would be incomplete without expressing my delegation's consistent support for CD expansion, as proposed particularly in the report presented last year by the Special Coordinator on expansion, Ambassador Hofer of Switzerland. We assure our colleagues from Ireland, Ecuador, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Tunisia of our full support for their aspirations to become members of the Conference on Disarmament. This process should continue and include other applicants for CD membership as well.

Our colleagues, in statements delivered in recent plenaries, initially mentioned that the 1999 session of the CD had reached its chronological middle point, then crossed the middle point of the second part of the CD session, and now it is my turn to remind us that we are approaching the end of its second part. But the Conference has not adopted either a set of decisions on how to deal with each and every agenda item (which we used to call a comprehensive programme) or a decision on establishing one or two subsidiary bodies to deal with the issues where consensus exists, provided that purpose-oriented consultations on other items continue and intensify. In this context, Ukraine, as a member of the Eastern Group, would be happy if the positions of our four regional groups became identical; but, unfortunately, this is still not the case. For the time being, the Conference is obviously following the first of the three paths mentioned by Anne Anderson, the distinguished Ambassador of Ireland, in her statement of 27 May. In that time many delegations were becoming more and more inclined to having within the CD at least one subsidiary body, carrying out negotiations up to the end of this session. Among them were those who unambiguously favoured an approach based on the adoption of the comprehensive programme of work. At the same time,

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they advocated the need to continue intensive consultations on the agenda items where there was still no agreement in the Conference, such as nuclear disarmament and PAROS.

In that spirit, the delegations of Chile, Italy and Ukraine, in order to assist the presidency in its endeavours to find a practical compromise for the work of CD, submitted a relevant proposal to the President, which was circulated by the Group Coordinators to all delegations. The substance of that proposal and the reasons why the three delegations had introduced it were self-explanatory. We did not ask for this proposal to be registered as an official document, at least at that stage. Our interest was not to contribute to a further proliferation of proposals as to how the substantive work of the CD should be organized, or to see the names of our countries as the authors of one more CD official document, but rather to facilitate the search for a compromise. It is now to be hoped that common efforts by CD members, and still under your leadership, Mr. President, will lead us finally to a positive result.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Ukraine for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. We have now reached the end of the list of speakers. Are there any other delegations which would like to take the floor at this stage? The representative of Nigeria, Ambassador Ayewoh, has asked for the floor.

Mr. AYEWOH (Nigeria): Mr. President, please accept my very warm congratulations on your successful conduct of the affairs of the Conference on Disarmament since you assumed the position of President of the Conference. We are confident that, given your experience and untiring efforts, these will definitely contribute to breaking the current logjam in the adoption of the programme of work for 1999. Rest assured that my delegation will give you all the necessary support. I look forward to cooperating with you and other members of the Conference in advancing the cause of international peace and security. I also wish to take advantage of this occasion to pay tribute to Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, as well as his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, and the entire staff for facilitating the work of the Conference.

May I also seize this opportunity to commend your predecessor, the distinguished Ambassador of Viet Nam, for the able manner he steered the affairs of the Conference during his tenure? My thanks also go to all my colleagues who have welcomed me warmly to this important forum. It is my expectation that we will have very close and productive working relations in the near future.

At this point, I would not fail to mention the distinguished Ambassador of Egypt, who is leaving us very shortly. It is rather unfortunate, if I may say so, that he is leaving Geneva at the time when I am just arriving. When we first met at Montego Bay earlier in the year, I thought that I would spend a longer time with him in order to take full advantage of his words of experience. However, I would like to take consolation in the fact that he is leaving us for greener pastures, and the Nigerian delegation wishes him every success in his future endeavours.

(Mr. Ayewoh, Nigeria)

It is a matter of great concern that the Conference on Disarmament, halfway into the 1999 session, has not been able to adopt its programme of work as a result of lack of consensus on nuclear disarmament and prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS). May I comment briefly on these two issues that have been holding back progress on the work programme of the CD?

It is instructive to note that this lack of progress is not due to the absence of efforts or a dearth of proposals to end the needless gridlock. What is lacking is the requisite political will to translate these efforts into meaningful action.

I wish to affirm that our priority remains nuclear disarmament. It is my delegation's considered view that the "business-as-usual" attitude in some sections of the CD cannot contribute to confidence-building. Our appeal is that the 61 members of the CD should therefore be genuinely involved in facilitating the process for the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament without further delay. My delegation however supports the proposal made by the Ambassador of Venezuela for the establishment of an ad hoc working group on nuclear disarmament if that will lead to some progress.

Let me place on record that we do recognize that important bilateral steps have been taken by the United States of America and the Russian Federation through the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks process to reduce their nuclear warheads. The Nigerian Government welcomed these steps and considered the actions encouraging. However, to achieve the common objective of this body, the pace of nuclear disarmament has to be accelerated and other nuclear-weapon States persuaded to recognize the need to join the process. The end result of the process should be a universally negotiated treaty that will ban the production, stockpiling and the use of nuclear weapons.

With regard to the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS), recent developments have demonstrated the need for the establishment of an ad hoc committee on PAROS. We recognize the fact that outer space should be free of an arms race as a common heritage of mankind. We remain committed to efforts that will achieve this objective. We therefore support any mechanism that will prevent the weaponization of outer space.

Finally, there is no doubt in my mind at all that the challenges before the Conference in 1999 are enormous. We need courage, transparency and flexibility to meet these challenges. The Conference can make the difference between security for a few nations and peoples and security for all humanity, irrespective of nation, race and State.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Nigeria for his statement and the words of friendship he addressed to me and to those who have preceded me in this post. Are there any further requests to take the floor? I see none. I shall now make some closing remarks.

Four weeks ago, when I took up the post of President of the Conference on Disarmament, I stated in my introductory remarks that our Conference is not designed to cope with deadlock in its work, still less with failure, and that

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while it is assuredly the receptacle into which events that occur outside Geneva flow in order to influence it, it can in its turn send positive signals towards the international community, that community which has entrusted it with a mandate, that of negotiating international disarmament instruments, which - forgive me my candour - it is not fulfilling at this moment. Today I can say that no signal has left the Conference and the movement of release so much desired by the Chair and all the members of this body has not taken place.

As I have already had occasion to say on many occasions, from the very beginning of its mandate the Chair embarked on consultations to ascertain the views of the various parties, and to assess, without any prior assumptions, the chances of success of the possible options which were available at that time. With reference to the statement made by our colleague de La Fortelle just now, who spoke of Utopia, I think that the Conference on Disarmament should not reject Utopia, because Utopia is first of all the domain of the possible.

These first consultations made it possible for me to reach four conclusions. Firstly, a keen and unanimous awareness of the need for the Conference on Disarmament to get its substantive work going without any delay. Secondly, the frustrating conclusion that what was possible in the CD at the beginning of its session, or even later on, was no longer sufficient to constitute a basis for compromise, in view of the implications of certain developments linked to certain aspects of international security and international relations. Thirdly, if the initiation of the work of the Conference on Disarmament is to enjoy better chances of success, it must involve the drawing up, on a basis of consensus, of a general work programme which is necessarily comprehensive and balanced and of course takes account of the interests and priorities of all the members of the Conference. This requirement was mentioned a number of times in the course of my bilateral consultations and also in the course of the Presidential consultations and reaffirmed in plenary meetings of the Conference. Fourthly, the Conference on Disarmament might well miss an additional opportunity to avoid deadlock if its members were to disperse on the occasion of the imminent inter-sessional break without reaching agreement on the work programme.

Proceeding from these observations, the Chair strove to construct patiently and progressively the foundations of a compromise on the two items of its work programme which remained pending, and which are still pending today, namely, nuclear disarmament and the prevention of an arms race in space. The challenge was a simple one but a major one: how to bring the Conference to work on items already agreed by securing agreement on the items which are not yet agreed. I tried to translate into concrete terms what in my view appeared to constitute a possible basis for compromise.

With regard to nuclear disarmament, given the importance and the priority accorded to this matter, I sought to develop a balanced compromise based on the recognition that neither the troika mechanism, even if strengthened, or the establishment of an ad hoc committee, as proposed by the group of States known as the G.21, could win everyone's support. The mechanism I proposed - an ad hoc working group responsible for undertaking an

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exchange of views and information on the question of nuclear disarmament and exploring prospects which might help attain that objective - seemed to me to be a reasonable compromise which could meet with a favourable response from all delegations. I must confess that I was encouraged by most of the reactions I received to that proposal, and by the flexibility displayed by a number of delegations which, up to that time, had a settled position on the issue. I can now say that the ad hoc working group mechanism has been unanimously accepted, while the mandate, for its part, requires some further consultations.

With regard to the issue of preventing the arms race in space, the informal proposal which I submitted is aimed at the establishment of an ad hoc working group to examine and identify, by means of a general and substantive survey, the specific themes and proposals which could constitute the basis for an in-depth examination, including the aspects relating to possible confidence-building or transparency measures, to general principles and to treaty commitments, with a view to preventing the militarization of outer space. This proposal also takes account of the resolution which was overwhelmingly adopted, without any vote against and with only one abstention, by the last session of the United Nations General Assembly, and therefore took account also of the unanimous wish of the international community to see our Conference addressing the substance of this problem. It also takes into consideration the concerns of certain parties with respect to negotiations on this matter. So, the idea was to resume, within an appropriate body, a discussion which has already taken place in this forum in the recent past and which should be capable of opening up prospects for substantive examination of the concerns of the various parties without any prior assumptions. I was able to note that this option has so far won the support of a large majority of the members of the CD without, unfortunately, culminating in the consensus, which is essential for it to become operational. This is so both for the mechanism and for the mandate.

In the foregoing I have provided you with information on the two pending issues: nuclear disarmament and outer space. The effort which I initiated, as can be seen, basically meets the concern for a synthesis which is indispensable to clear the deadlock in our work. It needs to be supplemented by the effort made by all delegations to achieve convergence in order to succeed in identifying the framework for a balanced compromise which will enable us to begin our substantive work without any delay. It was submitted in the conviction that progress on one of the items would, through interaction, encourage progress on the second item and would thus open the door to the attainment and progressive construction of the compromise. This construction has already begun and has been partially attained. It has yet to be finalized once it has contributed to circumscribing qualitatively and quantitatively the factors of divergence. It is in fact the question of PAROS which has given a new shape to the priorities which are traditionally seen in the CD. This is understandable because we are aware in this forum that time is needed to take the necessary distance in order to better analyse, better assimilate and better understand developments, sometimes rapid, but whose direct or indirect impact on the international system of security and strategic stability opens up different prisms of analysis. Even if the

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construction of the consensus has only been partially attained, my feeling is that the Conference on Disarmament has never been so close to consensus since the beginning of the present session.

Today all of us together are obliged to recognize - and it is the President who must be the first to say so - that on the eve of the end of the second part of our session and with eight weeks before it concludes, the Conference still has to draw up its work programme and discharge this mandate which has been entrusted to it by, and for which it must answer to, the international community. We must not forget that sovereign States which are not members of the CD follow our work closely and wish to understand the reasons for our stagnation. Those States may judge us severely because they can highlight the fact that since the finalization of the CTBT, apart from the work conducted by our distinguished colleague Ambassador de Icaza on security assurances, the CD has not carried out any substantive work, still less any negotiations.

To these comments I would like to add a few observations prompted by these few weeks in the Chair. During the difficult moments in my consultations, I was mindful of the discussions which we all had under the guidance of our distinguished colleague from Chile, Ambassador Javier Illanes, who was then Special Coordinator on the improved and effective functioning of the CD, and it is important that the members of the Conference, in their wisdom and their courage, should be able to address certain aspects of the functioning of this body. We must all agree and recognize that an item on the agenda of the Conference must be able to be examined, studied or negotiated in a subsidiary body if such is the general wish, consensus being there to provide the best guarantee that each delegation can make its views heard, defend them and protect the interests of its country where substance is concerned. Consensus, in this view, should lead to convergence and cannot be likened to a veto: it is a method of work designed to prompt member States to listen to each other, to negotiate in full awareness of interests which are sometimes, if not often, divergent, and to find formulas which meet the concerns of all. In substance, consensus is a means for reaching agreement and not a means for provoking or creating disagreement: if it is transformed into a veto, that means there is no desire for dialogue or negotiation.

The Algerian delegation has made use of all the means available to the Chair; it has spared no effort to perform its task in ensuring that it was working in the best possible conditions for the success of its task, by imposing on its efforts a sustained but moderate pace in order to enable delegations from time to time to carry out the necessary evaluations and to obtain appropriate instructions and by striving as far as possible to reconcile the imperatives of transparency and the requirements of negotiation. At the end of this term of office, it is up to each delegation to evaluate what has been achieved. Over these four weeks I have been able to observe and pay a very respectful tribute to the self-denial and professionalism of the delegations which have defended their positions. I have also noted the valuable and inestimable assistance which all the delegations never ceased to provide to the Chair in order to get the work of the CD going; I would like to convey to them here at the same time my gratitude but also my hope that the Argentine term in the Chair will succeed in making further progress with the

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effort that has been begun. I would also like to thank the group coordinators, the Ambassadors of France, Slovakia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Ambassador of China for all the assistance they have given me. My deepest and sincerest gratitude also goes to the secretariat staff, headed by Messrs. Petrovsky and Bensmail, a devoted, competent, professional, discreet and always available team. Before returning to Algeria's seat, from where I shall continue to participate as head of delegation in the construction of the necessary and essential consensuses, it remains to me only to pass the baton to the Argentine delegation, which I wish to assure here of my absolute readiness and full commitment to work alongside it, assuring my old friend Ambassador Guillermo González of my personal support and my constant readiness to assist.

As we have come to the end of our agenda, I would like to conclude by informing you that the next plenary meeting of the Conference will take place on Thursday, 24 June 1999, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.